

Charting the Future:

A Long-range Plan for the Unitarian Universalist Church of Las Cruces



September 22, 2006

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Las Cruces
2000 South Solano Drive
Las Cruces, New Mexico 88001
505-522-8621
<http://www.uuchurchlc.us>

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September 12, 2006

Dear Members and Friends,

For over 50 years, we have gathered together, sharing our search for common meaning and common purpose. Growing from a small group of 15 to our current membership of 186, moving from lay-led worship to permanent settled ministry, expanding from living rooms and rented spaces into building ownership, we have become a substantial church.

Nurtured by our past and the church we have been, we now look ahead to the future and to the church we can become. This Long-range Plan describes how we can become a richer resource for spirituality and personal growth for our members, a more vital source of shared community for our congregation, a more active presence in our local community, and a stronger voice of reason in the world. This is a vision of the church we can be.

In the development of this plan, we have been guided by the mission and vision of the church and by the results of previous church surveys, assessments, and goal-setting sessions. We have also been guided by input from program and committee leaders, inspiration from the congregation and the Minister, and our own collective brainstorming. The plan that has emerged focuses on both spiritual and practical aspects of the life of the church.

Rather than relying on total membership, the plan uses *participating membership*—the number of people who regularly attend church, participate in programs, and contribute their time, talent, and treasure—to identify important milestones in the church's development and to signal the need for structural and programmatic changes along the way. It projects the growth of our participating membership from about 140, its current level, to 300, a level we don't expect to reach for at least another five years. Since growth may be variable, situations might arise that would call for revision of the plan. It is the continuing responsibility of the Long-range Planning Committee to review the plan and its relevance with the congregation every year, to revise the plan as necessary, and to extend it so that we are always looking some years ahead. Like all such plans, this plan is a work in progress.

In the spirit of the covenant we affirm each Sunday, this plan charts a course that both stems from and furthers our mission—to live and spread the Unitarian Universalist ideals of religious freedom, personal religious responsibility, interdependence, and openness. We hope the plan will be a useful tool in achieving our vision of a growing liberal faith community that challenges us in our search for spiritual fulfillment.

Further, we hope that each of you will search this plan to find those goals and activities that spark your interest, reflect your values, speak to your dreams, and inspire you to achieve them. We turn to you now to work together as a congregation to make this vision become a reality for the UUCLC.

In community,
The Long-range Planning Committee

Susan Bagby
Bob Bishop

Brian Hurd
Rebecca Richins

Charlie Scholz
Bob Weissberg, in absentia

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Executive Summary

“Here we search for common meaning and common purpose.”

—The Rev. William Sinkford

UUA General Assembly 2006, St. Louis, Missouri

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Las Cruces is entering an exciting period of growth in new membership and renewed interest and activity of long-time members. With this infusion of new and renewed spirits, the church is well poised to consider its current position, important and significant next steps, and its course for *Charting the Future*.

In *Charting the Future*, the Long-range Planning Committee examines a range of information from the congregation and church leadership with the aim of identifying key milestones and potential actions that the church might consider as the future unfolds. Eight sections are presented in which we address specific elements and areas of the church as a living organization that is in touch with its spiritual, physical, and financial underpinnings. Each section is formed around highlighted Goals and Recommendations that identify both intentions and actions for future consideration. Key themes and thrusts that emerge in each of these are highlighted below.

Our Shared Community. Coming together, sharing, and promoting opportunities for service and leadership are hallmarks of the UU church and an actively shared ministry. These goals are strengthened with attendance and participation, with clear communications, and with activities that extend the church’s love, care, and affirmation to individual members. As the church grows, ministry is increasingly a shared responsibility of the Minister and individual members. Expanding opportunities and participation in small- group activities—e.g., covenant groups, service groups, committee efforts, etc.—creates avenues for enhanced ministry and greater individual responsibility. In addition to strengthening interpersonal bonds and community within the church, small-group activities promote greater self awareness, active individual participation, and empowered leadership.

Spiritual Growth. Fundamentally, the church represents and serves the spiritual quest and growth of its congregation—both individually and collectively. The church promotes spiritual growth in several ways, including the quality and clarity of themes and messages, the experience of the physical space and conditions, and the availability of multiple pathways of expression for spiritual communication. The Sunday worship experience is our primary artery for spiritual growth and communication, and the entry point for most new members. The quality of the Sunday experience is promoted by clear, meaningful, and resonating themes, embellished by music, welcoming greeters, available seating, and adequate parking.

The Wider Community. The church has a face in the wider community, which is both a focus of service in our lives beyond the church and a source of new spiritual bonds and members. Whether in our jobs, recreational pursuits, or civic service, we can carry, express, and reflect our UU values in all of our deeds and activities. Enhancing the visibility and presence of the church’s face within the community can contribute immeasurably to the church’s goals, missions, and needs. Possible directions to consider include increasing awareness of opportunities for individual members to identify themselves as UUs; enhancing the publicity, promotion, and marketing of church activities and events; and adding ministerial staff that can contribute and add focus to the social justice and civic services of the church.

Growing Our Congregation. Blessed with a vibrant and growing community, the church is fortunate to have newcomers—some with UU pasts and some only curious about Unitarian Universalism. Removing actual and perceived barriers to growth should be first and foremost in our individual and collective consciousness. Although some of these barriers are clear and identifiable, such as inadequate sanctuary space and parking, others may be less clear and will require additional effort to identify and remedy. Retaining and integrating new members is a vital activity and prime opportunity to secure the future. “Welcome, welcome, welcome” should be promoted as our spiritual equivalent to “location, location, location.”

Program Development. We have terrific staff and programs in Religious Education (RE) and music. These are cornerstones for the strength and future of the church, and can help to enhance congregational growth, spiritual growth, and our face in the community. Raising awareness of the nature and quality of our programs will serve to broaden participation within the church and across the wider community, strengthen spiritual growth, and challenge the programs to sustain their excellence.

Administration and Staff, Physical Spaces, and Finances. These areas are the functional framework that provides the operational context for nearly all of the church’s activities. The quality and morale of the staff is the lifeblood that enables the functioning of the church and helps the congregation to focus on ministry and spiritual concerns. Adequate physical space is a challenge we have recently faced and will continue to face as the congregation grows. Financially, the church is sound but is not flush with resources. It is imperative that sound fiscal management underlie all of the church’s major decisions, whether additions or changes to the administration or the physical spaces. It is key that church members realize and accept their shared responsibility for shouldering the church’s financial obligations and ensuring the future continuity and adequacy of these resources. We must reach out with expectations of continued generosity from existing as well as new members. This can only be built upon a continuation of trust in the fiduciary responsibility of the church and in the transparency and accountability of the church’s financial undertakings.

Engaging in *future thought* always seems to tap an emotional thread. It fills our individual—and collective—souls with anticipation and enthusiasm, with hopes and dreams of future possibilities. Often these are quickly tempered by fears and anxieties brought about by uncertainty and by risk, by the learned caution of past experience and disappointment, and simply by unfamiliarity, change, and fear of the unknown.

Fortunately, our church is blessed with a congregation of many talented, knowledgeable, and skilled individuals, a congregation of pioneers who have braved harsh winds, of young spirits learning to take flight, of the hard-working people making ends meet, of families seeking community and love, and of gifted angels that sow their seeds of goodness. Acting in community to bring together the insights and resources of our collective capability enables and empowers us to think of our future, to infuse it with hope, with cautious optimism, with reason and deliberation of impacts and consequences both seen and unforeseen, and with fiscal restraint and responsibility.

We find that there is both desire and strength within our church and congregation to take a bold look at where we are, what we have become, and where we might like to go. We hope this summary whets your appetite to read on. We hope you will join us in *Charting the Future*.

Charting the Future

The Long-range Planning Committee is pleased to share our collective thoughts about the opportunities that face our congregation. Over a number of months we have met with key members and leaders within the church and reviewed results of congregation surveys and suggestions with the goal of developing a reasoned and reflective view towards our future, our needs, and our possibilities.

In this document we present a reasoned and considered framework for planning that is strategically valuable for a church of our size and stature. The plan characterizes our current congregation, facilities, and relationships. It also identifies recent trends in the congregation and incorporates views that reflect the church's needs and desires in reaching its potential in ministry to our present and future congregation and to the wider community in which we live.

The document begins with a look within the congregation, moves outward toward growth and the wider community, then returns to examine the role and expectations for our church programs, administration, and facilities. Specifically, the plan considers these areas in eight separate sections: Our Shared Community, Spiritual Growth, The Wider Community, Growing Our Congregation, Program Development, Administration and Staffing, Physical Spaces, and Finances. This document discusses the role and importance of each area and presents the goals the committee has identified and recommendations for how we might achieve them. Key milestones and their corresponding congregational actions and resource implications are tied to membership participation levels, and summarized in tables for each area.

In developing the goals and recommendations, we have strived for breadth, in many cases leaving the particular steps and execution as topics for future consideration once the plan has been adopted. In other words, this is a strategic, not a tactical, plan.

The greatness of this church—in particular—is the vastness of the creative and expressive talent that forms its membership. Our charge to you is to read and reflect on the ideas presented, to find those ideas that you can embrace, and to work hard for their realization.

Our Shared Community

We gather together to seek, to serve, to learn, to love, and to grow in community. Our sense of shared community emerges strongly in every congregational assessment and survey. We deeply cherish the church environment we have created, an environment in which we love, care for, and support one another as we discover common values, search for common meaning, and work for common purpose. The work we do in community nourishes the soul, the mind, and the body.

As we grow in numbers and make the transition to a mid-size church, we are necessarily becoming a church in which each member shares with the Minister the responsibility for ministry. Part of that responsibility involves reaching out and ministering to others in the congregation. Another part is ministering to the church community as a whole by sharing our time, talent, and treasure. Embracing this responsibility rewards us with closer friendships, deeper experiences, greater spiritual involvement, and an even richer sense of shared community.

Goals

1. Sustain a strong sense of community

The church maintains closeness, a strong sense of community, and support for and among the members as it increases in size.

Recommendations

- Encourage regular attendance at and participation in worship services by creating a lively church environment and strengthening the interpersonal bonds among church members.
- Increase formal communication through announcements in *The Light*, covenant groups, committee meetings, a telephone tree, the Sunday order of service, the web, and email.
- Beginning with the Board and Council and expanding to the membership at large, conduct workshops that promote the learning and practice of right relations so that all members of the congregation can explore and express divergent views in a safe and respectful environment.
- Ensure that those with disabilities are cared for in our church community with accessible facilities and other appropriate aids.
- Memorialize members with a permanent brick walkway and memorial garden.

2. Promote an actively shared ministry

The church helps each member discover and apply his or her own ministry as we support and care for one another.

Recommendations

- Expand covenant groups to further close relationships and increase caring among members.
- Support members and friends in need, under the coordination of the Caring Committee or, as membership grows, a Trained Credentialed Lay Minister.
- Maintain a Committee on Ministry that helps monitor the ministry of the church.

3. Enhance opportunities for growth in service and leadership

The church provides opportunities for our members to “serve others in community.”

Recommendations

- Build a culture of giving with workshops designed to help members identify where and how their talents, time and energies can be used.
- Continue to include in New UU workshops information about the responsibilities of membership.
- Develop and maintain a comprehensive database of information about members and friends, their talents, and their interests. Use it to bring like-minded people together with carefully directed information, announcements, and opportunities.
- Develop, maintain, and publicize a list of opportunities for volunteering in both large and small ways within the church community.
- Build the church’s leadership expertise by supporting members’ attendance at Leadership School (at a cost of approximately \$700 for each participant and a flat fee of \$200 for the church), adding support for additional attendees as participating membership grows.

Key Milestones – Our Shared Community

	Participating Members			
	150	200	250	300
Congregational Actions	Teach a class in right relations for the Board and committee chairs	Include a class in right relations as a permanent adult education offering		
	Conduct a workshop to identify our talents	Include a class to identify talents as a permanent adult education offering		
		Research requirements and cost for a memorial walkway	As part of new building phase, establish location for memorial walkway	Install memorial walkway
	Establish covenant groups	Add 2 new groups	Add 2 new groups	Add 2 new groups
	Develop and maintain a well-publicized list of opportunities for volunteering within the church community			
Resource Implications	Coordinate caring through Caring Committee	Add part-time paid Trained Credentialed Lay Minister	Increase Lay Minister’s hours	Increase Lay Minister’s hours
		Find office space for Trained Credentialed Lay Minister		
	Establish a skills database	Maintain skills database		
	Support one member’s attendance at Leadership School	Support 2 members’ attendance at Leadership School	Support 4 members’ attendance at Leadership School	Support 6 members’ attendance at Leadership School

Spiritual Growth

Many of us have joined this religious community to grow spiritually. Our affirmation speaks to our quest for truth and knowledge so that each of us might grow into harmony with creation. We grow spiritually in many ways including through worship services and shared experiences, religious education, and personal introspection.

Worship is a celebration of our common beliefs and values, our connection to the world around us, and our covenant. Because the Sunday worship experience is our primary artery for spiritual growth and communication as well as the primary vehicle for gathering in new members, the quality and clarity of our worship message and experience is paramount. Education programs designed to guide self-discovery can help us find our spiritual direction. Providing opportunities for quiet contemplation and personal introspection can only help us along that path.

Goals

1. Enhance the quality of worship services and provide pathways of spiritual growth for church members

The church is a place of inspiration and exploration. It provides meaningful and inspiring worship experiences, and it provides opportunities to stretch its members' hearts and minds and encourage them to grow spiritually, drawing on the wisdom and perspective of diverse religious and cultural traditions.

Recommendations

- Provide alternative worship services in a variety of times and settings: off-site retreats, silent retreats, evening services, vespers, weekday morning meditations, etc.
- Institute a regular weekly evening service that is less traditional than the Sunday morning service, such as a coffee hour or jazz service.
- Organize short- and long-term worship themes:
 - Provide spiritual content in Sunday services that corresponds to themes coordinated by the Minister and Sunday Service committee, with a focus on Social Action and other timely topics when possible.
 - Coordinate supplementary programming (Round Table, other Adult Education) to inspire thought and discussion about the themes and related topics.
 - Increase the Sunday Service Committee annual budget to include honoraria for additional outside speakers to enhance offerings related to worship themes.
- Invite clergy and representatives of other religious traditions to conduct worship services.
- Provide high-quality technical back-up for worship services: sound system, projection system, staging area, acoustics, lighting, etc.

2. Expand opportunities for personal spiritual growth and provide sanctuary for souls in need of spiritual renewal

The church provides opportunities for individual and shared worship, meditation, interaction, solace, safety, and spiritual growth to serve those in need of spiritual renewal.

Recommendations

- Increase classes with religious/spiritual content.
- Expand covenant groups to encourage the exploration of spirituality beyond the context of worship services.
- Provide increased opportunities for interactive shared spiritual experiences.
- Provide quiet and inspiring physical spaces that foster meditation and reflection.

Key Milestones – Spiritual Growth

	Participating Members			
	150	200	250	300
Congregational Actions	Correlate themes of services, covenant groups, round table, adult classes, social action	Provide supplementary programming for Adult Education	Provide supplementary programming for Adult Education	Provide supplementary programming for Adult Education
	Provide alternative worship and shared spiritual experiences	Provide periodic additional services		
Resource Implications			Increase number and quality of outside speakers	
		Include high quality electric and electronics for worship as part of building program		
		Include meditation space as part of building program		
		Plan for expanded worship space as part of building plan		

The Wider Community

Responsibility to our church is not limited to the work we do within our walls. We must reach outside the congregation to the wider community if we are to take a more active role in our local community and become a stronger voice of reason in our world. Reaching out means taking the responsibility for reflecting our UU ideals and values in the broader community, in our jobs, daily activities, and interactions. It means taking the responsibility for finding ways to be of use in the community and for helping our society on a personal or organizational level. It means developing, supporting, and participating in programs and activities where we perceive need, thus building an awareness of UUs as responsible leaders and civic-minded people.

Currently we promote social action and community programs such as the Blue Box, Adopt-A-Highway, J. Paul Taylor Center outreach, 50-50-50, Change for Change, collections for the Community of Hope, the Tombaugh Gallery, and school and social programs that provide mentoring for children. We should continue these programs while expanding our participation in other community endeavors.

Goals

1. Define and actively live our UU values

As a congregation and as individuals, we live our UU values daily. We are recognized as a church that stands by its values, welcomes all people, and promotes the rewards that come from finding ways to be of service to others.

Recommendations

- Conduct values clarification workshops to help our members define their individual values and learn to present and model them clearly.
- Identify ourselves as UUs in our daily interactions to build awareness of the impact of church members in the community.
- Maintain a list of community service opportunities that vary in time, scale, and level of activity. Help members find and volunteer for groups whose missions they support.
- Expand the Welcoming Congregation activities to include adult education classes and to make the work of the Welcoming Congregation committee the work of the congregation.
- Ensure that our congregation is inclusive and welcomes all people.

2. Increase the presence and visibility of the church in the community

The church becomes a focal point in the local community for social action programs. It becomes known for its support of marginalized groups and is recognized as a resource for the community. The church helps members find ways to satisfy their desire to be involved.

Recommendations

- Add a Social Justice Minister to develop programs that will heighten our position and role in addressing community needs and to coordinate large service projects with other churches and service organizations.
- Find a niche for community service and become identified with it.
- Develop a process to identify, select, and publicize several meaningful service projects as an annual focus for the church.

- Make our church a community center where exciting things happen.
- Develop a public relations program to inform the community about our church, its available facilities, programs, and worship services.
- Make more use of our location and our signage to publicize the church and its programs. Use temporary banners to advertise important events that might appeal to the community.
- Update the website regularly with news of church events and meetings; sermon previews and podcasts; information about adult education and RE programs, information about volunteering in the church and the community; and features about special programs.

3. Build greater denominational awareness and participation

The church increases its attendance at Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) and Mountain Desert District (MDD) events and increases its representation on denominational and district committees. We become more aware of the services we can provide and those that we can receive from the denomination.

Recommendations

- Publicize the UUA and MDD and their functions and services to the congregation and as part of every New UU orientation.
- Provide funding for registrations and stipends for members and staff who attend and participate in Cluster Meetings, MDD meetings, and UUA General Assembly, so that we can increase our congregation’s knowledge of denominational services and support.
- Encourage members to run for positions on MDD and UUA governing boards.
- Publicize and focus on annual UUA Study Action issues and outreach programs in services and in discussion groups.
- Continue our financial contribution to the UUA by including our Fair Share denominational dues in every budget.

Key Milestones – The Wider Community

	Participating Members			
	150	200	250	300
Congregational Actions	Conduct values identification workshops. Develop process to identify and select service projects	Coordinate current service projects	Expand service outreach	
	Expand and publicize Welcoming congregation activities			
	Research community education and recreation programs	Increase educational and recreational offerings to community		
	Improve PR	Expand PR		
		Expand participation in UUA affiliated projects		
Resource Implications	Develop job description for and hire Social Justice Minister quarter time	Increase Social Justice Minister to half time	Develop and coordinate larger community service projects	
	Find office space for Social Justice Minister	Find appropriate space to house new programs		Create a community center as part of building program
	Partially support 2 members’ attendance at MDD meetings and GA; Increase support as membership grows.			

Growing Our Congregation

Because a growing congregation is a vital congregation, maintaining growth in the UUCLC is important. Growth follows naturally when we provide opportunities for close community, spiritual growth, and service. It's happening already. Currently, we have 186 members and our membership is increasing by 25–30 people per year. At this rate, we expect and must plan for a total membership of over 300 in the not too distant future. Decisions about growth must consider both the *total* membership and the *participating* membership. Participating members—those who regularly attend church, participate in programs, and contribute their time, talent, and treasure—comprise about 75% of our total membership.

We are paying close attention to our visitors. We hold frequent workshops to train our members to be effective Greeters, and we have established a “buddy mentoring” program for new members and a “greeter angel” program for visitors. We maintain the nametag cabinet and the membership directory, and make sure that a good supply of church and UUA pamphlets is always on hand in the foyer. We must continue these activities while we look for additional ways to welcome and integrate people who choose to join us.

Goals

1. Remove barriers to growth

The church allows growth to happen by removing impediments such as inadequate sanctuary space, inadequate parking, too few services, inattention to visitors, failure to help new members find their place in the church community, and perpetuating the myth of an inner circle.

Recommendations

- As membership increases, expand to three worship services each Sunday to accommodate growth, different schedules, and different ideas of worship.
- As part of the development of our physical spaces, include consideration of sanctuary space and parking.
- Make it easy and appealing for families with children to be part of our congregation:
 - Welcome children in worship services.
 - Provide child care for all services and major church activities.
 - Provide year-round RE activities.
 - Hold church sponsored events in child-friendly places both on and off the church campus.
 - Provide programs and activities which specifically appeal to youth.
- Encourage members to bring friends to church activities, such as social events, gallery openings, services and activities on topics of special interest.
- Institute self-sustaining subsidies to support the attendance of visitors at church events and programs, such as Community Night.
- Enhance the Campus Ministry with Soulful Sundown services, youth services, and participation in university events.
- Develop specific sanctioned UU subgroups, such as UUs for Buddhism, Pagan UUs, etc.

2. Retain and integrate new members

With an eye to our future and in the spirit of inclusiveness, the church actively recruits and carefully integrates new members, especially families with young children, university students, members of minorities and marginalized groups, and friends and acquaintances. We work to increase the proportion of members who actively participate in the church.

Recommendations

- Teach the congregation how to make visitors feel welcome, especially visitors who represent minorities and marginalized groups.
- Institute a culture that makes welcoming and integrating new members the responsibility of every member, not just the Membership committee.
- Make sure that Sunday hospitality keeps pace with membership growth.
- As the number of visitors and new members increases, increase New UU and Continuing UU classes and workshops to teach the responsibilities of membership.
- Share the church leadership with new members.
- Scrutinize church communications to ensure they don't assume a knowledge of church culture that only long-term members can have.

3. Adopt and follow a working Long-range Plan

Church development generally follows the Long-range Plan approved by the congregation, but is flexible enough to allow for the execution of brilliant ideas and plans that are brought to the Board and congregation for approval when opportunity knocks and funding is available.

Recommendations

- At the beginning of each year, hold a retreat for outgoing and incoming committee chairpersons to evaluate the goals and recommendations stated in the Long-range Plan and to determine how committees will work towards achieving them.
- As part of the Long-range Planning Committee's work, annually evaluate the Long-range Plan, revising as necessary and extending it by a year.

Key Milestones – Growing Our Congregation

	Participating Members			
	150	200	250	300
Congregational Actions	Ensure stability of hospitality system			
	Establish buddy system for new members			
			Add a third worship service	
	Begin dedicated youth programs	Provide year-round RE Provide child care for all services		Provide RE for all services
	Improve PR		Advertise to specific minority groups	
	Advertise Welcoming status			
	Expand welcoming congregation emphasis	Expand campus ministry	Develop specific UU subgroups	
	Train more greeters	Expand greeter program		
	Hold an annual retreat for committee chairpersons and Long-range Planning committee			
	Evaluate and revise the Long-range Plan			
Resource Implications	Increase budget for publicity and advertising	Increase commitment of RE teachers and staff	Increase by 50% the activities, responsibilities, and costs associated with worship services	Increased commitment of RE teachers and staff
		Increase child care budget line item		

Program Development

Programs form the dynamic foundation for many of the church's functions, activities, and events. They enrich and enliven the spiritual and material experience of church members and guests; they promote awareness and action based on UU values and ideals; and they stimulate both spiritual and congregational growth. As a primary pathway for building and fostering active participation within the congregation and stimulating recruitment and retention of visitors and new members, program development and continued support is *key*.

Current church programs address our commitment to learning (Religious Education and Adult Education), spirituality (music program, art in Tombaugh Gallery, t'ai chi), and making a difference in the world (the 50-50-50 program, Blue Box, Adopt-A-Highway, J. Paul Taylor Center outreach, Change for Change, and collections for the Community of Hope). These important programs should continue and should be the basis for additional program offerings that interest and enrich our community.

Goals

1. Develop and offer interesting year-round Religious Education and Adult Education programs with broad appeal

The church provides life-span learning programs that stimulate, raise awareness, broadly educate across religious traditions, and raise participation at all levels.

Recommendations

- Increase the integration of social justice themes and volunteer opportunities into the RE curriculum, particularly at the older levels.
- Establish cooperative teaching teams for all RE classes.
- Establish new programs such as a UU nursery school, RE family nights, "Tween Nights," and an RE class for developmentally delayed individuals, as need dictates.
- Provide financial support to encourage young adult members to participate in district UU young adult conferences and General Assembly.
- Evaluate existing Adult Education programs to assess their ongoing role within the church and community, assess support levels and needs, and to affirm the church's commitment to the program and its goals.
- Promote learning together by encouraging all members to take church-sponsored classes on a regular basis.
- Increase coordination of worship themes with program activities and events. Cross pollinate to stimulate participation and growth.
- Create a speakers program open to the community; possible topics include the relationship of art and music to religion.
- Purchase multimedia and sound equipment to enhance RE, adult RE, and Roundtable presentations and music and speaker programs.
- Publicize programs inside and outside the church.
- Support joint programs, such as OWL and Peace Camp, with children and youth from outside our congregation.

2. Raise community awareness of our excellent Religious Education program

The church publicizes the RE program widely, recognizing that RE is an important pathway to reach into the wider community and stimulate growth, particularly among young families without strong existing church affiliation but with a desire to address the spiritual curiosity of young growing minds.

Recommendations

- Publicize programs relentlessly.
- Purchase space in the *NMSU RoundUp* and obtain professionally produced table displays to advertise the campus ministry.

3. Expand musical and artistic offerings

The church actively supports, encourages, and promotes musical and artistic endeavors that celebrate UU values by enhancing the expression of feelings and emotions, stimulating contemplation and serenity, heightening the sense of community, and fostering the appreciation and experience of the aesthetic.

Recommendations

- Establish a Music Committee to support and expand the music program, and consider such programmatic changes as a summer music and arts camp, a children's choir, a cluster- or District-wide choir festival, a liturgical movement/dance group, etc.
- Explore additional avenues for expressions of musical service and ministry interactions, such as enhancing musical training and awareness within underprivileged communities.
- Assist the Music Director in becoming professionally accredited through the UU Musicians Network.
- Encourage participation in performances by providing rehearsal and performance space.
- Enhance monthly art exhibits with speakers and demonstrations and provide extensive publicity.
- Create a docent training program for the gallery so that it can remain open 5–6 days a week.
- Create liaison between the Gallery Committee and the Sunday Services Committee to include art-related themes in Sunday services.

4. Expand opportunities for participation in Social Action and community volunteer programs

In keeping with the core UU spirit of service, the church expands and publicizes opportunities for individuals and groups to volunteer for Social Action and community projects.

Recommendations

- Highlight and raise awareness of opportunities for volunteering and social action within the congregation and the community.
- Establish ecumenical study/action groups on specific social issues.
- Work with the Sunday Service and RE Committees to integrate social justice themes into the services and curricula.
- Significantly increase in the amount budgeted annually for social action and community volunteer support, especially with respect to the addition of a Social Justice Minister.

Key Milestones – Program Development

	Participating Members			
	150	200	250	300
Congregational Actions	Establish cooperative teaching teams for RE	Add new programs: Tween Nights, family nights		Add new programs: UU nursery school
	Coordinate worship themes with programs and events	Create a speakers' program open to the community		
	Create and maintain a docent program for the Tombaugh Gallery	Establish a Music Committee	Establish summer music program	Establish a children's choir Sponsor a choir festival
		Consider additional staff support for music and arts programs		
		As part of building plan, explore possibilities for rehearsal space		
		Establish ecumenical study groups on social issues		
	Publicize opportunities for volunteering and social action			
Resource Implications			As part of building plan, research and purchase multimedia and sound equipment	Develop appropriate space for new programs such as UU nursery school
	Provide funding for publicity for RE	Provide financial support for youth involvement in UUA and MDD events		
			Include budget line items for special programs	
	Provide financial support for Music Director accreditation			
	Provide increased funding for social action and community support			

Administration and Staffing

According to Rev. Ken Brown, UUA District Executive of the Pacific Southwest District, church staff typically falls into two general categories: program staff and support staff. Program staff members educate, empower, and enable the congregation to help develop programming. Support staff members provide clerical, technical, and physical support for the programs and ministry of the church.¹ Most consultants recommend that congregations maintain ratios of one full-time program staff member and one full-time support staff member to each 100 *participating* congregational members (The ratio of program and support staff to total membership is different.) Janitorial services and hired professional services are not included in the ratios. Rev. Brown cautions that adding staff at a faster rate can be detrimental to growth because it discourages volunteer involvement.

For many years, exceptionally dedicated volunteers did every bit of the work of the UUCLC. As we have grown and matured as a congregation, we have added paid staff positions. We now have a full-time position for the Minister and half- or three-quarter-time positions for the Director of Religious Education, Music Director, and Office Manager. In combination, these positions equate to approximately 1.5 program staff members, but only about 1.0 support staff members. Additionally, we hire the professional services of a bookkeeper, employ a part-time Janitor, and hire child care providers on an as-needed basis.

The recommendations for staff growth that appear in this plan are timed to adhere to the staff–membership ratios suggested by Rev. Brown. As our congregation grows, we should add program and support staff at the recommended rate. The careful administration of our staff is a key responsibility of the congregation.

Goals

1. Build adequate program and support staff

As the membership grows, the church builds the program and support staff to manage the operation and work of the church.

Recommendations

- In 2007, increase staffing to provide full-time office support.
- As membership increases, build the staff:
 - Program staff should include a part-time Social Justice Minister and might grow to include an expanded role for the Music Director and DRE and the addition of a Trained Credentialed Lay Minister and Choir Director.
 - Support staff might grow to include an Office Assistant, a part-time accompanist and Choir Director, and a part-time Buildings and Grounds Supervisor
 - Employ a full-time Janitor and expand the role for the Bookkeeper.

2. Guarantee fair employment practices and policies

The church ensures fair salary and benefits for all staff members. Our employment policies are up to date and available to all staff members. The church maintains a supportive working environment.

¹ Rev. Dr. Ken Brown, “Staffing Decisions in a UU Congregation,” August, 2005

Recommendations

- Ensure that all necessary HR policies and procedures are in place and that an HR handbook is available to the staff and congregation.
- Ensure that all necessary policies and procedures for all office and committee operations are in place and that a Policies and Procedures manual is available to the staff and congregation.
- Review all HR policies and procedures annually.
- Annually, research and review UUA salary and benefits standards and guidelines for each staff position. Keeping in mind how salary levels affect other aspects of church life, increase salaries by 4%/year until parity is reached with a level appropriate for a church of our size, adjusted geographically.
- Standardize salary payment to the Music Director.
- Maintain benefits that include long-term disability insurance and health care for all staff.
- Encourage constructive feedback from the congregation, the Committee on Ministry, the Board, and the Human Resources Committee, and encourage positive conflict resolution when necessary.
- Publish staff office hours in *The Light*, on the website, and on the door, and respect those hours.
- Cover the cost of pertinent UUA and other training and peer interaction opportunities for the Minister and staff, increasing the amount budgeted for training annually, up to five days per year.
- Build a financial plan for managing the ministry and operation of the church during the Minister's sabbatical.

Key Milestones – Administration and Staffing

	Participating Members			
	150	200	250	300
Congregational Actions	Include sabbatical planning in budget process for 2007 and 2008			
	Interview and hire Social Justice Minister	Interview and hire Office Assistant	Select Trained Credentialed Lay Minister	Hire Choir Director
	Commit to fair employment practices according to UUA guidelines			
Resource Implications	Budget salary for Social Justice Minister quarter time	Increase Social Justice Minister to half time	Budget salary for Lay Minister quarter time, increasing to half time	Budget for Choir Director half time
	Increase staff salaries according to UUA guidelines			
	Budget salary to increase office support to full time	Budget salary for quarter- or half-time Office Assistant	Increase Office Assistant to full time	Increase Music Director to three-quarter time
	Provide office space for Social Justice Minister	Provide office space for Office Assistant	Provide office space for Lay Minister	
		Increase Janitor to full time		

Physical Spaces

In 1977 we purchased the present sanctuary and office wing and the two acres of land on which they sit. In 1995 we were deeded the adjacent property (land and apartments) to the north, bringing our total acreage to just over four acres. In 1999 we embarked on the first phase of a major building project. At a cost of approximately \$350,000—fully financed internally—we added an enclosed sanctuary foyer, the gallery, and a new Religious Education building. At the same time, the city built a paved 60-space parking lot on the south side of our property, giving us a total of 70 parking spaces. In 2006—again entirely with internal financing—we completed a \$36,000 remodeling of the original office wing into a Resource Center to create comfortable office and meeting space.

The growth in our church has necessitated expansion in our facilities, and more is on the horizon. The sanctuary can hold about 100 people in its current configuration. Currently, 140 people on average attend church on Sunday, so we have added a second service year-round to accommodate everyone. When the average Sunday attendance approaches 225, our physical constraints will make a third service essential, regardless of other factors that might make an additional service desirable.

The sanctuary is not the only space that is crowded. We don't have enough space to dine together. A fellowship hall with a large kitchen is becoming more and more necessary. Our outdoor space also needs attention: our children need shaded playground space and our parking lots are often full. When our average Sunday attendance grows to 225, we will outgrow even our borrowed parking space.

Taken as a whole, our buildings and grounds help determine the community's impression of the church. Therefore, we must add to our buildings and grounds and maintain them as attractively as possible.

Goals

1. Use our entire property effectively and responsibly

As membership increases, the church enhances its facilities and grounds with the next phase of the building program, adding elements that might include a larger sanctuary, a fellowship hall, community center facilities, additional administrative space, planned landscaping, and a community garden, so that we have adequate space for worship, programs, events, fellowship, administration, and expansion.

Recommendations

- Commit to and follow the professionally planned development of our buildings and grounds, rather than taking a spur-of-the-moment, piecemeal approach to solving space and landscaping needs.
- Immediately select and empower a Building Committee to oversee the vision, financing, design, and construction of the next phase of the building program.
- Complete a site plan of all church property as it exists currently, as input for the building project.

- Conduct a building project feasibility study to assess the congregation’s willingness and ability to support the project financially.
- Select and contract with an architect for a new Master Plan, to be completed in 2007, to include a phased approach to site development for all buildings and landscaping.
- With the architect’s assistance, conduct congregational meetings to obtain consensus on the priorities and requirements for the next phase of building. Possible priorities might include the following:
 - A well-equipped sanctuary that will accommodate 300+.
 - A social hall with a professional kitchen and seating for 150.
 - A complete landscaping plan that includes a memorial garden and pathway.
 - An improved outdoor play area with shade covering.
 - Twice the available parking.
 - A community center.
 - A community garden.
 - Retirement apartments, perhaps for residents in a covenantal or co-housing commitment.
- With an approved Master Plan, initiate a capital campaign to finance the agreed upon building phase.
- When plans for the building phase are complete, approve plans, build the buildings, dedicate them, and celebrate our achievement.

2. Create a comfortable and aesthetically pleasing church environment

We pay attention to the importance of aesthetics in creating and maintaining appropriate indoor and outdoor spaces for worship, meditation, education, and socializing. We plan for aesthetics as carefully as we plan for other aspects of our facilities, so that the church is a comfortable and pleasant place to work, worship, and play.

Recommendations

- Form an Aesthetics Committee to develop guidelines and coordinate a consistent look and feel for the church buildings and grounds, and to work closely with the Building Committee regarding the new Master Plan.
- Explore possibilities for correcting acoustics in existing buildings.

3. Carefully maintain of our buildings and grounds

The church maintains and repairs buildings and grounds with a full-time janitor and hired Buildings and Grounds support.

Recommendations

- As membership increases, add the hired services of a part-time Buildings and Grounds support and a full-time janitor.
- Organize a landscaping maintenance calendar for seasonal work parties.

Key Milestones – Physical Spaces

	Participating Members			
	150	200	250	300
Congregational Actions	Board appoints a Building Committee that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Completes a site analysis of all current facilities and property - Begins a new Master Plan effort - Conducts a feasibility study for a building campaign 	With favorable feasibility study: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With Board approval, Building Committee selects and hires an architect to create a phased Master Plan, with extensive congregational input - Building Committee initiates a 3-year capital campaign with an anticipated goal of \$1.5–2.5M 	With favorable capital campaign: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Architect completes final design and pricing for next building phase - Groundbreaking - Building 	Building phase is complete. <i>Dedicate and celebrate!</i>
Resource Implications	Budget for current site plan and feasibility study	Budget for Master Plan	Maintain standards of stewardship and pledging during capital campaign	
		Budget for cost of conducting capital campaign	Manage capital campaign funds astutely	

Finances

Because the UUCLC is not supported financially by the UUA, the fiscal requirements and realities of our church are the fiduciary responsibility of every member of the congregation. If we are to be good stewards, we must build policies and practices that ensure both the current and the future operation and flourishing of the church.

As this plan is being written, the church owes approximately \$72,000 to church members who loaned money to Phase I of the building project. Some of these loans may be forgiven. Additionally, approximately \$98,000 is outstanding on the mortgage on the property we acquired in 1995. We pay approximately \$9270 annually on that mortgage. Although rental income has previously covered the annual mortgage payments and rental property maintenance, we do not expect that to continue past 2006. Decisions about the use of our property are both imminent and crucial.

There is growing concern that we tend to operate on a deficit budget and that we use fundraisers to provide funding when pledges aren't adequate to meet the budget. The crisis-management approach to budgets and spending prevents the development of responsible long-range fiscal planning, which we owe those who come after us.

Goals

1. Commit to responsible fiscal policy, philosophy, and practice

The church operates with balanced or surplus multi-year budgets, relying entirely on pledges for the operational budget and on fundraisers only for special projects. We actively work to liquidate old debt.

Recommendations

- Move away from crisis management and unplanned spending and towards careful fiscal planning with a multi-year budget beginning in 2007.
- Set a cap on deficit budgets. Ultimately, eliminate deficit budgets entirely.
- Meet the financial challenges to a growing church, without tenants in the RE building.
- Place a priority on prudently reducing our existing debt and repaying the generosity of our donors before launching a building campaign. Include a budget line item for debt reduction and consider scheduling another "Miracle Sunday."
- Review and update policies for the endowment and other special funds.
- With professional assistance if necessary, study how the UUCLC can use available funds to make money.
- Investigate alternative ways of raising funds and grant possibilities for new initiatives instead of drawing funds from the current operating budget.

2. Encourage a culture of stewardship and pledging by 100% of the congregation

This church belongs to us, and so does its future. The church expects and receives responsible and reasonable pledge support from all members.

Recommendations

- Establish and publicize reasonable stewardship and pledge expectations for members at all income levels and stages of life.
- Investigate and initiate varied pledge processes, including recognizing major donors.
- Develop and sustain a culture of stewardship and of giving time, talent, and treasure to the church in order to get more from it.
- Talk about money openly.
- Frequently explain fiscal policy, the budget process, and the current financial situation to the congregation.

3. Develop budgets that reflect our mission and vision

Our budget is a reflection of our values. We spend our money wisely and ethically. There is a place in our budget for giving back to the community and for charity to those outside our congregation.

Recommendations

- Budget generously for operational items and charitable projects that reflect our mission and vision.
- Examine all budget line items for agreement with our mission and vision.

Key Milestones – Finances

	Participating Members			
	150	200	250	300
Congregational Actions	The Board and congregation set a cap on deficit budgets	Establish and maintain a 5-year budget		
	Develop and enact a plan for reducing current debt			
	Initiate a 100% pledge and stewardship program	Develop and initiate new pledge drive processes		
	Review the budget with regard to our mission			
Resource Implications		Raise money one year for the <i>next year</i>		
	Raise pledging to cover the operational budget completely			
	Include a budget line item for debt reduction			
	Include a budget line item for charity			

A Financial Forecast

This forecast is an indication of the kind of annual financing that will be necessary if the church grows as anticipated and if it is to support the goals and recommendations presented in this Long-range Plan. Like the rest of this Long-range Plan, it is based on membership levels, not fiscal years. The forecast is based on today's dollars and today's costs. Please use this forecast to guide your thinking about our church's financial future, but not as a firm financial plan. It is only an estimate.

Projected personnel costs are based on average 2006 salary levels suggested for our geographic area by the UUA. These costs reflect the addition of staff as our membership grows. Because personnel costs historically constitute the largest part of our church budget, currently 68.7%, we have used them to estimate the level of our total expenses in the coming years. The costs for programs, administration, and facilities management have each been estimated as percentages of total expenses using the percentages in effect in 2006. Denominational dues are membership driven. Please note that debt reduction is not included here because a plan is not yet in place. Similarly excluded is the cost associated with the next phase of building.

	140 (Current)	158	203	250	300
Participating members (75% of total)					
Personnel (note 1)	\$135,387	\$153,073	\$197,540	\$258,227	\$295,859
Programs (note 2)	\$11,460	\$14,823	\$20,610	\$27,488	\$34,452
Office Administration (note 3)	\$11,475	\$12,923	\$16,810	\$20,788	\$24,978
Facilities Management (note 4)	\$25,530	\$28,966	\$37,677	\$46,593	\$55,685
UUA/MDD Dues (note 5)	\$12,960	\$14,706	\$19,128	\$23,655	\$28,423
Total Budget	\$196,812	\$224,491	\$291,765	\$376,751	\$439,397
Pledge/Plate Income (note 6)	\$144,550	\$189,470	\$246,250	\$317,978	\$370,851
Other income	\$26,600	\$35,021	\$45,515	\$58,773	\$68,546
Deficit	\$25,662	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Number of pledge units (note 7)	130	147	189	231	280

Notes

1. With 4% annual increase, depending on position.
2. 5.8% of total budget in 2006, increasing to approximately 8% over time.
3. 5.8% of total budget in 2006.
4. 13% of total budget in 2006.
5. 6.6% of total budget in 2006.
6. Pledges and contributions of record = 84.4 % of all income in 2006.
7. Pledge units = about 93% of participating membership.

Our Mission

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Las Cruces is a diverse group of committed religious individuals seeking knowledge, spiritual sustenance, fellowship, and service to others. The mission of the church is to live and spread the Unitarian Universalist ideals of religious freedom, personal religious responsibility, interdependence, and openness.

—Adopted by the Congregation, April 24, 2005

Our Vision

We envision a growing liberal faith community that challenges people in their search for spiritual fulfillment.

—Adopted by the Board, December 21, 2005

Our Covenant

Love is the doctrine of this church,
The quest for truth is our sacrament
And service is our prayer.
To dwell together in peace,
To seek knowledge in freedom,
To serve others in community,
To the end that all souls shall grow into harmony with creation.
Thus do we covenant with one another.

***The Unitarian Universalist Church of Las Cruces
2000 South Solano Drive
Las Cruces, New Mexico 88001
505-522-8621
<http://www.uuchurchlc.us>***